

The Denver Unity Meeting (1)  
Roy H. Lanier, Sr.

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In the early part of July a congregation in the city sponsored a Unity Meeting with the desire to promote a better feeling, if not actual unity, among the various groups within the Restoration Movement. I have no criticism of their purpose, nor of the manner in which the meeting was conducted. I do have some criticisms to offer with reference to some over all tones of the meeting and some of the doctrines advocated. Since I had to be in a meeting in Canada at the time, I did not get to attend; but I had my tape recorder there and I have heard most of the speeches. I have not rushed into print with my reactions. I have obtained tapes carrying the speeches of Bro. Carl Ketcherside in a similar meeting in California some months ago. I have listened to all of these, parts of them repeatedly, and have copied long excerpts from some of them, to be sure I do not misrepresent anybody.

Brethren whom we generally associate with churches of Christ here in Denver who spoke on the program were Otis Gatewood, Elbridge Linn, LeRoy Durley, and M. F. Cottrell. Men associated with non-class and instrumental music groups were also on the program. Gatewood, Linn, and Durley were conservative, teaching the truth on the subjects assigned them, but did little to expose the false doctrines and wild speculations presented. This is not meant as criticism, but a mere statement of fact. Bro. Cottrell, who tells me he thinks he is more liberal in his views than Bro. Ketcherside, (hereafter for sake of space referred to as Bro. K.) could not be expected to expose, much less oppose, the liberal views expressed.

There was one thing which stood out prominently during the meeting. When reference was made to our Christian Church brethren and to denominations, the statements were always guarded and padded lest they might be construed as derogatory. But when reference was made to the many groups who do not use instruments of music, they were usually sarcastic and belittling. They were spoken of as having "three sneers for everything and three cheers for nothing;" as being more likely to "call on a known drunkard or adulterer for prayer in public worship than a pure sincere brother who does not follow the party line," and several other like expressions.

Bro. K. was featured in this meeting, making four speeches, two more than any other man, and taking a prominent part in the "question and answer" periods. There is no doubt in the minds of conservative brethren of the area that the meeting was sponsored for his benefit to give him the opportunity to promote his program of union without regard for differences in doctrine. He says "God's unity is unity of diversity" in doctrine as well as diversity of gifts from God. I regard Bro. K. as a man of outstanding ability, a man who has few equals and perhaps no superiors in many respects. He has dedicated himself to the work of uniting all who believe in Jesus as the Son of God. His is a noble purpose and he is capable of doing great good in the field. He says there are twenty-four (at times he says twenty-five) groups of the non-instrumental music brethren. He deplores this division, and rightly so. No doubt he will do much good by calling our attention to the sinfulness of this divided condition. He also calls on all of us to be charitable toward all the rest of us. He points out with great power the foolishness of dividing and refusing to fellowship one another because of our differences of opinion on such subjects as classes, cups, fermented wine, etc. In all such things we can all wish him success.

But there are so many things in his program which I think will do great harm that I fear the harm will outweigh the benefits of his efforts. First, I think his efforts will give much encouragement to the spread of liberalism among us. And by "liberalism" I simply mean that broad, charitable, tolerant view which takes into its fellowship every sincere person whether he is scriptural or unscriptural in his doctrine and practice. As an instance of this, he denies that a confession of faith with the mouth is essential to salvation. In an article to follow I plan to show why he is wrong about this. He also accepts into his fellowship all baptized

believers regardless of their doctrine and practice, so long as it is not immoral or does not deny the deity of Jesus. I think this is entirely too liberal, broad, and will give my reasons why in articles to follow. Next, I think his efforts will weaken our appeal to people in the denominations about us. He teaches that every sincere believer in Jesus as the 'Son of God is a child of God and his "brother in prospect" regardless of whether he is ever immersed. How can a man who preaches such a doctrine as that ever induce a Methodist to leave "the church of his choice" and be immersed? If he is a child of God, saved from sin, and on the way to heaven, why make any change? In articles to follow I will give excerpts from his speeches to prove he holds such position and will give the refutation of the false doctrine.

As Bro. K. rides the pendulum from extreme conservatism to extreme liberalism he becomes wilder in his interpretation of scripture. At times he pays no attention to definitions of words as given by accepted scholars in that field. At other times he disregards tenses of verbs which have a lot to do in determining the meaning of statements. Such is the case in his interpretation of Rom. 16:17. Here his effort is to prove that we are not to withdraw from brethren regardless of their doctrine, and he makes the word "doctrine " refer to what Paul was writing at the time. The word "learned " is in the aorist tense and describes "point action" in the past, not the doctrine Paul was teaching in the letter he was presently writing.

Bro. K. puts an interpretation on 1 John 5:1 which will get him into no end of trouble. He thinks every person who sincerely believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is begotten of God "at the point of faith," as Baptist debaters used to say, and if and when he is baptized he will be born of God. He fails to recognize that the word "begotten" is used in the context to refer to a child of God who has overcome the world, is in Christ, and has eternal life. In an article to follow I will develop the position taken by Bro. K. and then expose the doctrine with scriptural arguments.

Bro. K. is rapidly becoming the outstanding exponent of this liberal doctrine. Already the "concerned ones," to use his own term, are asking him what they should do to get the movement under way and extend its growth and influence. But it must be said to his credit that he is doing his best to prevent the crystallizing of his influence into a separate sect. He confesses with shame that he was once a devout member of a sect which contributed greatly to the shameful condition of the church of God today, and he vows that he will never again be a member of a sect as long as he lives. He exhorts all the "concerned ones" to stay in their present religious groups and work for unity on the basis of his liberal teaching. This is another reason why I think his efforts weaken him, as well as the rest of us, in efforts to lead people in denominations to obey the gospel. Why should a Presbyterian who is one of the "concerned ones," who has overcome the world and is in Christ and on the way to heaven, leave the church of his choice to obey the gospel while Bro. K. is telling him to stay in his religious circle and use his influence for unity?

This will give our readers some idea of material to come. We cannot take space to answer all the wild speculations indulged in during the meeting, but I do think several articles should be written because of the influence of the men in the movement.